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TO PRIORITY F C O

TELEGRAM NUMBER 2934 OF 2 OCTOBER

INFO SAVING ALL CG'S IN USA, BIS NEW YORK, UKMIS NEW YORK, ANKARA, ATHENS, BRUSSELS, BONN, COPENHAGEN, LISBON, LUXEMBOURG, OTTAWA, OSLO, PARIS, ROME, REYKJAVIK, THE HAGUE, UKDEL NATO, UKDEL VIENNA, DUBLIN, UKREP BRUSSELS, MADRID, MOSCOW AND TOKYO.

MY TELNO 2763: THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN 

SUMMARY

1. RAISING FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES, MONDALE SHARPENS HIS ATTACK. THE TROUBLES OF THE LABOR SECRETARY, DONOVAN ADD TO THE SLEAZE FACTOR. BUT WITH FIVE WEEKS TO GO, REAGAN IS STILL WELL OUT IN FRONT.

DETAIL

2. THE BEIRUT EMBASSY BOMB AND GROMYKO'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON HAVE BROUGHT FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES MORE TO THE FORE IN THE CAMPAIGN OVER THE LAST TEN DAYS. MONDALE HAS SOUGHT TO BLAME REAGAN FOR THE FAILURE OF EMBASSY SECURITY IN BEIRUT, AND HAS BEEN SCEPTICAL OF HIS 'DEATHBED CONVERSION' TO THE CAUSE OF PEACE-MAKING WITH THE RUSSIANS. BUT THE SHARPENED ATTACK HAS NOT YET SERIOUSLY DAMAGED THE PRESIDENT.

3. THE BEIRUT BOMBING, WITH ITS REMINDER OF EARLIER-US FAILURES IN THE AREA, LOOKED BRIEFLY AS IF IT MIGHT BECOME A SERIOUS ELECTORAL ISSUE. IT MAY YET, AND THE PRESIDENT HAS CERTAINLY HANDLED IT BADLY. RESPONDING TO MONDALE'S ACCUSATION OF SLOWNESS IN COMPLETING EMBASSY SECURITY WORKS, HE DREW A RASH COMPARISON WITH DELAYS IN RE-DECORATING A KITCHEN. THE ERROR WAS COMPOUNDED WHEN HE LATER WENT ON TO BLAME THE 'NEAR-DESTRUCTION OF OUR INTELLIGENCE CAPABILITY' IN THE PAST, AND WHEN HIS STAFF EXPLAINED THIS AS A REFERENCE TO THE CARTER-MONDALE ADMINISTRATION. THIS PROVOKED A STRINGING RIPOSTE FROM MONDALE, DENIALS BY VARIOUS FORMER CIA CHIEFS (INCLUDING BUSH), AND SUBSEQUENT BACK-PEDALLING BY THE WHITE HOUSE.

4. MONDALE HAS ALSO SOUGHT TO CAPITALISE ON THE GROMYKO VISIT. HE HAD HIS OWN BRIEF MOMENT OF LOOKING PRESIDENTIAL WHEN HE MET GROMYKO IN NEW YORK ON 27 SEPTEMBER AND AFTERWARDS ANNOUNCED THAT HE SAW SOME OPPORTUNITY FOR SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS IN US/SOVIET RELATIONS. BUT HIS MOMENT IN THE SPOTLIGHT WAS INEVITABLY UPSTAGED BY THE SUBSEQUENT REAGAN/GROMYKO MEETING. AS FORESEEN, GROMYKO'S VISIT WAS AN ELECTORAL PLUS FOR THE PRESIDENT. MONDALE'S COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE LATENESS OF HIS CONVERSION TO TALK OF PEACE MAKE LESS IMPACT HERE THAN DOES THE COVERAGE OF A SOVIET LEADER IN THE WHITE HOUSE, WITH THE PRESIDENT URGING HIM TO AGREE TO TALK MORE.

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5. DONOVAN, SECRETARY OF LABOR, IS ALSO IN TROUBLE. A GRAND JURY HAS INDICTED HIM AND HIS CONSTRUCTION COMPANY ON CHARGES OF GRAND LARCENY AND FRAUD. DONOVAN HAS DENIED THE CHARGES AND CONDEMNED THE PARTISAN TIMING OF THE BRONX ATTORNEY-GENERAL. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER THIS FRESH EXAMPLE OF THE SLEAZE FACTOR WILL STICK.

6. THE LATEST POLLS - TAKEN BEFORE MONDALE LAUNCHED HIS FOREIGN POLICY ATTACK - CONTINUE TO GIVE REAGAN A COMFORTABLE LEAD (18 POINTS ACCORDING TO GALLUP). THE MONDALE STAFF ARGUE THAT HIS SPEECH LAST WEEK AT GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY, CASTIGATING 'THE NEW REAGAN' IN THE TOUGHEST LANGUAGE HE HAS USED SO FAR IN THE CAMPAIGN, COULD MARK THE BEGINNING OF A NEW PHASE. THIS REMAINS TO BE SEEN. THE POLITICAL PUNDITS POINT OUT THAT THE GAP USUALLY CLOSES IN THE LAST FIVE WEEKS. HUMPHREY WAS 15 POINTS BEHIND NIXON AT THIS STAGE IN 1968 BUT CLOSED TO 1 POINT ON ELECTION DAY: FORD CLOSED FROM 11 POINTS TO 2 POINTS IN 1976. BUT WHILE THE MARGIN MAY WELL BE SMALLER THAN THE POLLS NOW SUGGEST, THE ODDS REMAIN HEAVILY ON REAGAN. THE FORTHCOMING TELEVISED DEBATES (REAGAN/MONDALE ON 7 AND 21 OCTOBER, BUSH/FERRARO ON 11 OCTOBER) ARE NOW SEEN AS MONDALE'S MAIN HOPE OF MAKING A DRAMATIC SURGE. BUT REAGAN WON SIMILAR DEBATES WITH BOTH BUSH AND CARTER IN 1980.

FCO PAS SAVING ANKARA, ATHENS, BRUSSELS, BONN, COPENHAGEN, LISBON, LUXEMBOURG, OTTAWA, OSLO, PARIS, ROME, REYKJAVIK, THE HAGUE, UKDEL NATO, UKDEL VIENNA, DUBLIN, UKREP BRUSSELS, MADRID, MOSCOW AND TOKYO.

(REPEATED AS REQUESTED)

WRIGHT

FCO(PALACE)WHITEHALL

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